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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MASERU 000143

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SUBJECT: POTENTIAL SHIFTING WEIGHTS IN LESOTHO'S RULING PARTY

REF: (A) MASERU 124 AND PREVIOUS

CLASSIFIED BY: JUNE CARTER PERRY, AMBASSADOR, EXEC, STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Over the past two weeks, Ambassador has met with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Finance, Health and Tourism and Culture. In our conversations with Foreign Minister Moleleki, Finance Minister Thabane, Health Minister Phooko and Tourism Minister Nts'inyi, we have detected a hesitancy on the part of the latter three to discuss the January 29 shooting of the Foreign Minister and a special effort to reassure the international community that security and democracy remain top priorities for the ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD). While Foreign Minister Moleleki retained his position as Information Head of the LCD, Minister Nts'inyi assumed the number two position as Deputy Executive Secretary of the party. In her position, Minister Nts'inyi has significant responsibility for national elections (2007) preparations and LCD relations with opposition parties. Her role now appears to be a greater one within the Government. At the same time, Moleleki's dramatic claims about the January attack have not been verified through a formal government statement or through a police report. A media report on a second attempted assault on Moleleki (February 27) was confirmed by the Foreign Minister, but dismissed by military and police authorities as an attempt to burnish his image. There have been rumors of a potential Cabinet shuffling since late 2005. It remains to be seen whether any immediate changes will be forthcoming, but there is certainly a sense of ongoing development within the party. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Foreign Minister Moleleki's discussions with us over the past two weeks have centered on the January 29 attack as well as bilateral and multilateral issues. Moleleki has continued to assert that the January attack and the alleged February 27 attack were both the result of Communications Minister Thabane's machinations. He has also strongly alleged that Libya's envoy to Lesotho (Ambassador Algamudi) is on close terms with Communications Minister Thabane and he has an agenda that the Foreign Minister claims Tripoli has not approved. Specifically, on March 16, the Foreign Minister charged the Libyan Ambassador with a disingenuous attempt to console him while he was in the hospital. At that time, the Foreign Minister said the Libyan envoy asked the Foreign Minister if anyone had been paid to mount this attack. Moleleki saw the Ambassador's query as a

suspicious one since he himself had not made any mention of a paid, would-be assailant. Moleleki is planning to go to Tripoli soon and express his questions about Libya's representative in Maseru. We observed during this conversation that Moleleki appeared to have lost weight and seemed somewhat obsessed with the Libyan issue. Despite these confirmed or unconfirmed attacks on his life, the Foreign Minister told us he was planning to travel to Johannesburg on March 17. He considered his residential security adequate and seemed to have no concerns about this trip and, in fact, took pains to say that he would drive himself.

13. (C) Moleleki also reasserted his role in the foreign affairs arena and his relationship with Prime Minister Mosisili (who had asked him about the status of the proposed Article 98 Agreement with the U.S.) (Note: We had already delivered our response to the GOL's draft agreement and took the opportunity on March 16 to provide another copy for the Foreign Minister and one for the Attorney General. We have not received a response to our points delivered March 8. End Note) The Foreign Minister's situation was not clarified during our March 14 meeting with Minister of Tourism Nts'inyi. There was a decided reluctance to discuss it and to shy away from any comment on the state of his health, the response of the government, or any police investigation. She said the security environment was stable following the January 29 incident. Nts'inyi, former GOL Ambassador to Germany, on the other hand, went to great lengths to express her appreciation for our bilateral relationship and for the sustained U.S. interest in supporting Lesotho's electoral processes. She stated that her government and her party were most interested in peace, stability and orderly 2007 national elections. We emphasized how important it was to build on Lesotho's democratic process to date and stated our commitment to support an open and fair process over the coming year. For the first time in over a year, Nts'inyi was named Acting Foreign Minister on March 17. Her designation, which

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usually falls to the Minister of Local Government or the Minister of Justice, is interesting, coming in conjunction with her elevated status in the LCD ruling party.

14. (C) Minister of Finance Thahane shared with us, before our meeting with Nts'inyi, his doubts about obtaining a full account concerning Minister of Foreign Affairs January attack. He made no mention of any subsequent "ambush" upon the Foreign Minister. Thahane, in his role as special representative of the global fund, as well as in his full time portfolio focused also on the importance of stability. We raised with Thahane the necessity of continued progress on the bilateral front and our positive exchanges on the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) as Lesotho's interministerial committee continues to prepare its proposal. Although viewed by some as more of an outside player, within the Cabinet Thahane's voice clearly makes a difference in sending a strong, positive message to donors and to the international community at large. In a later conversation, Thahane revealed that bilateral issues to include the MCC proposal and the proposed Article 98 Agreement were scheduled to occur during an April 20 session. It appears, given the large amount of press he has been given during the budget meetings, that Thahane's profile is rising somewhat and that each public statement he makes includes positive reinforcement for investors and donors. We observed that Thahane represented the Prime Minister during a March 10 ground breaking for a new hospital in Maseru; he hosted us at a follow-on lunch with business representatives from South Africa.

15. (C) At the same event, the Minister of Health reaffirmed Lesotho's interest in working with the private sector as well as donors in improving health care, particularly in the area of HIV/AIDS. In a meeting with the Ambassador, Minister Phooko requested additional assistance in analyzing the organizational needs of his Ministry. We indicated that we would continue to support the leadership of the government of Lesotho in moving forward on the HIV/AIDS issue and we were in the process of reviewing our long term strategy. (Comment: Minister of

Finance Thahane in the same timeframe shared his impression that the Ministry of Health was disorganized and asked for our help in securing an overall director for the country's "Know Your Status Campaign". End Comment). Minister Phooko in response to our query on the implementation of the "Know Your Status Campaign", stated that he had put together a task force in the Ministry to begin addressing this problem and he hoped for assistance from the international community in this regard. In addition to reassuring the Minister of all of our support, both directly through the USG programs as well as through NGOs such as CARE, CRS, etc., we felt it was important during this time of critical pandemic to maintain stability within the country and to maintain sustained progress, particularly during the pre-electoral months ahead. The Minister, a relative of Prime Minister Mosisili, confirmed Minister Nts'inyi's assertion that the Government is committed to peaceful elections and to maintaining a tranquil and secure environment within Lesotho. Although the Minister of Health is viewed by the press and by the public as less competent than some of his Cabinet colleagues, he has continued to hold on to his position and, despite some criticism from the First Lady, appears to have a special relationship with the Prime Minister. In donors' opinions, Phooko's Ministry has serious human capacity needs and weaknesses; the international community has been offering technical assistance to him, especially in the HIV/AIDS arena.

16. COMMENT: Although it is not possible to predict developments over the coming months, it seems that the LCD is assessing how best to move forward to secure its place and leadership role during the national elections. As part of this process, the Minister of Tourism has been tasked to intercede for the Prime Minister with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to ensure that current commissioners continue to hold their positions as the country moves into the pre-electoral period. She has taken on the responsibility of assessing the opposition party's desire to end the terms of a number of commissioners and go into the 2007 elections with experienced members on the IEC. The fact that the Minister has moved into this high profile position of great responsibility as the party begins its preparations suggests that she will be playing a highly visible and important role in the year ahead. Concurrently, the conflicting stories and swirl of rumors around the Minister of Foreign Affairs have raised questions among government officials, diplomats and the public about his standing in the party, internal conflicts within the LCD and possible Cabinet changes. From our vantage point, on the whole all of these key players in the LCD constellation have reflected a desire to insure stability in the political and economic spheres and to send a strong message to the U.S. that the GOL is serious about a potential Article 98 Agreement and about the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). Our dialogue with these and other players including opposition and private sector elements are, we believe, continuing to reveal more about the inner

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workings of the LCD and the strength or weaknesses of the officers within it. End Comment.
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